

of miles farther on, where the river was turning to the south-west, we saw at last thick groves of living poplars eastwards across the river, amongst ice-covered lagoons and river-branches. There was no trace of reeds to tempt a crossing.

On descending we found that the Toghrak jungle extended for a short distance to our side of the river. Here we saw signs, too, of the visits of shepherds, lopped branches of poplars, and old sheep droppings. But after we had passed for less than a mile through the edge of a sandy jungle area, the river once more entered a zone of absolutely barren dunes. The many lake-like inlets of the river here began to be troublesome. The ice was now fast thawing, and though we could with care just pick our way across the lagoons, the camels were forced to great détours. From another high sand ridge we ascended I made out what looked like a continuous belt of Toghraks running south at some distance from the right bank of the river. It seemed worth while to abandon our course for this, if only reeds and scrub could be found there for the camels. So in order to prospect we pushed across to the right bank.

The bed here was fully 300 yards broad, and the ice had mostly melted along the banks where the water could be seen flowing in channels ten to twelve feet broad and about three feet deep. Before attempting to cross with the camels I was anxious to make sure of the ground ahead. So I hurried eastwards with Ibrahim Beg and a few men. After covering scarcely a mile between dunes and cones with live tamarisks we came upon a second bed, some 150 yards wide and with an open channel of water. We crossed this by wading. But when after a few hundred yards more we emerged on a third river bed nearly half a mile broad and with the nearest channel of running water at least four and a half feet deep, I realized that to trust our camels and baggage to this tangle of newly formed courses with possible quicksands would mean too great a risk. So after wistfully longing for water we now began to feel annoyed by its over-abundance.

As we resumed our march south the view of the river